

Monumental Moments: Tony Tasset

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Bad At Sports



Tony Tasset's artworks consistently aim to destabilize and question our understanding of value. Often perceived as humorous, whimsical or playful, the works poetically allude toward confrontations with mortality, timelessness and cultural awareness through slick pop-art fused objects. With a keen eye toward popular culture and extra-ordinary moments, Tasset is able to create works that engage viewer's latent memories with familiar cultural and iconographic forms. In his use of the everyday and mainstream as artistic materials, the transient is able to transcend the boundaries of time, allowing us to enter into a reconsideration of the objective world.

In a 2004 piece, a pile of dirty Chicago snow sits like a time-capsule in a storefront window wearing the grime of the city on its tabula rasa-like surface while simultaneously celebrating the engagement that everyone necessarily has with this winter material. A handmade crushed cup sits at the base of the pile

locating the works age through the Coca Cola logo that was used 10 years ago. In "Magnolias for Pittsburg," a pair of hyperreal faux magnolia trees sit motionless and forever in bloom as the world passes from season to season. That moment of rebirth and creation held perpetually in suspension like a photograph. Or in recent works where the moment of recognition is through the domestic kitchen or cleaning product. Utilizing these materials for their color, the works recall an accidental spill of material. Yet in these works the accidental lifts itself into the authority of a precisely calculated artistic gesture. Each of these works point toward a desire to commemorate and preserve a familiar moment by transcending the flow of time.

In a work from 2009, titled "My Empire," Tasset pokes fun at the prototypical self-portrait, that artistic trope that every artist wrestles with at least once. A chaotic accumulation of detritus, piled up and shimmering from an all over coating of resin sits on a found pallet. Upon closer inspection, it is revealed to be found objects and knick knacks that all hold personal associations to both Tasset and ourselves. Toy cardboard bricks commonly used to build forts as a kid, an old discarded cell phone, fragments of older projects, clown shoes and a cast plaster model of the artists hand are among the numerous objects covered in resin that pepper this accumulation. It is unabashedly abject in its presentation yet holds a sincerity in what it presents. We derive a feeling of nostalgia in the familiarity of the objects and can sympathize with the chaotic mess.

With "My Empire," Tasset's world of symbolism, meaning and reference is presented on a single palletted unit and ready for movement through the world. It is a personal cosmology tethered to its transportation device. In the same way that the dirty snow pile shows us the grime and debris under the facade of a smoothly operating city, "My Empire" shows us the messy creative process under the facade of a pristine art object.

For his inclusion in the 2014 Whitney Biennial, Tasset created "Artist Monument," a monument which is the vehicle of cultural commemoration and preservation, honoring artists who, like himself, work to capture a moment of time in an object. Affixed to two shipping containers docked at the base of Chelsea, the names of 392,486 artists are packed onto the surface of multi-colored acrylic panels. Alphabetized and etched in the same font size, any discernible form of hierarchical structure between the listed names is abolished. Recognition of the well known becomes blurred in a sea of information. Artists of historical significance and ones toiling in relative obscurity are equalized as one and the same gesture calling attention to the shared pursuit all artists have in the creative process. It is a monument to the heroic pursuit of becoming. At the root of the piece is the desire to be radically democratic by creating the ultimate group exhibition of all the artists known on the date the list was sourced.

Like all monuments, the "Artist Monument" is a register of a historical moment. It functions as a time-capsule and an ark to the creative process of this moment.